

Soberanes Adobe
336 Pacific Street
Monterey, Monterey County
California

HABS No. CAL-1892

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Western Office, Division of Design and Construction
450 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, California

PHOTOGRAPH-DATA BOOK REPORT
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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SOBERANES ADOBE

Monterey, Monterey County, California

ADDRESS: 336 Pacific Street
OWNER: State of California
OCCUPANT: Mayo Hayes O'Donnell (Mrs. William O'Donnell)
USE: Residence. After the death of Mrs. O'Donnell,
Historic Building.

ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Soberanes Adobe (technically Estrada-Soberanes) is one of the fine two-story adobe houses which constitute the chief domestic architectural glory of Monterey. Built in the later 1830's by Jose Estrada, it passed to the Soberanes family in 1860; its present owner, Mrs. Mayo Hayes O'Donnell, has presented the house as an historic monument to the State of California (State Historical Landmark No. 712), retaining lifetime use. (After being in the possession of the Soberanes family from 1860 to 1922, it passed to Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Louis Serrano and thence to Mr. and Mrs. William O'Donnell.) Characteristically, the house has the extremely thick walls, wood door and window frames and tile roof of most Monterey houses of the pre-American period; and like the Larkin house (prototype of the area), it has a second story veranda. (Here, it is on the front of the house only.) Mrs. O'Donnell has carefully restored the interior, with appropriate simplicity of backgrounds and fine period furniture; because of its color, the house is known locally as "The House with the Blue Gate".

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HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The most concise and accurate printed history of the house is in Laura Bride Powers' Old Monterey, p. 266: "...built by Don Jose' Estrada, then a ranking officer of the Presidio...The house was sold to Don Feliciano Soberanes whose family retained possession until about 1920, when it passed into the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Serrano, the former a descendant of the learned Don Florencio Serrano... The association of the house with the Vallejos came about, undoubtedly, through the marriage of Dona Maria Isadora Vallejo and Mariano Soberanes, brother of Don Florencio."

Bancroft (History of California) provides the basic biographical material of the first owners. Jose Mariano (Rafael?) Estrada was born in 1784 and came to California about 1829 and was a widower by 1836. Bancroft calls him one of the most respected and influential men in early California. Feliciano Soberanes was born about 1789. He is known to have been in Monterey by 1826; in 1829 and 1830, he was regidor, and then alcalde of Monterey from 1838 to 1839. In 1845, he was a juez: segundo, and was still living in 1851. Feliciano's brother, Mariano Soberanes, was a soldier and also held the office of alcalde in Monterey. Both Feliciano and Mariano had numerous children - Feliciano's wife produced twelve and Mariano's, seven. The Soberanes family continued in prominence in the American period, with important land holdings in the area.

The various writers on this house have so garbled the facts and dates, that it is difficult to find any absolute truth in a single source. Laura Powers remains the most sensible median interpreter of the data. The W.P.A. Guide to the Monterey Peninsula (p. 95) provides the same basic material, but cites the address as 314 Pacific Street rather than 336. The brochure of the Monterey History and Art Association (Old Monterey, unpaginated) is full of apparent errors of commission and omission. For example, it is stated that Feliciano Soberanes married a daughter of Don Ignacio Vallejo (father of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo); but, Bancroft says that Feliciano Soberanes' wife was Maria Antonia Rodriguez (not Vallejo). This same brochure on Old Monterey says that Mr. and Mrs. (Jean Booth) Reuben (mis-spelled Reuban) Serrano acquired title to the house in 1902, not the "about 1920" of Laura Powers. This date of 1902 is repeated in numerous other "Sources".

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The California Division of Beaches and Parks brochure on Monterey (unpaginated) appears to be the final authority on this date; here it is stated that the Soberanes family held the house from 1860 to 1922. The home became known popularly as "The House with the Blue Gate" at some period in the 20th century.

Mr. and Mrs. William M. O'Donnell acquired title to the historic adobe in 1941; and on June 3, 1953, Mrs. O'Donnell (Mayo Hayes) presented the house to the State of California as an historic monument - retaining use of the residence during her lifetime. Mrs. O'Donnell is a devoted local historian; and it is appropriate that the house reflects her interests in old Monterey, albeit with the personal touches of any more recent owner.

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL AND SOURCES

Books:

Bancroft, Hubert H., History of California; in collected works of H. H. Bancroft - San Francisco, A. L. Bancroft, 1884, Vol. XIX, pp. 792, 793 (Jose Estrada), Vol. XXII, p. 726 (Feliciano Soberanes).

Hoover, Mildred B. and Rensch, H. E. and E. G., Historic Spots in California, Stanford University Press, 1948, p. 279

Kirker, Harold, California's Architectural Frontier - San Marino, Huntington Library, 1960, pp. 13-19.

Monterey Peninsula in American Guide Series, Stanford University Press, 1946, p. 95.

Peixotto, Ernest, Romantic California - New York, Scribner's 1911, p. 107 (drawing).

Powers, Laura Bride, Old Monterey - San Francisco, San Carlos Press, 1934, p. 266.

Brochures:

Monterey State Historical Monuments, State of California, Division of Beaches and Parks, unpaginated 4-page brochure.
Old Monterey, The Monterey History and Art Association, unpaginated.

Path of History in Monterey Today, unpaginated fold-out, No. 10 on the map.

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Periodicals:

Pacific Gas and Electric Progress, Vol. XLI, No. 2 (February 1964), p. 8.

ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Typical of the more "progressive" adobes of the 1830's (Kirker - California's Architectural Frontier, pp. 13-19 - feels that none of the two-story adobes can date before about 1836), the Estrada-Soberanes adobe is a long, low-slung building with wood balcony-veranda on the second story of its principal (east) elevation. Built of local adobe bricks, with thirty-three inch walls at the base, the house reflects those much older building traditions of Spanish and Mexican California which produced most of the structures prior to the American Period. The elevation of the Soberanes adobe, however, as stated earlier, is unusual in terms of the formal traditions of Spain and, especially, Mexico. Most architectural historians see the influence of the balconies and second story verandas of the Old South. Larkin is thought to have provided the formal prototype in his house of 1835 in Monterey, and to have been inspired by the use of second story verandas in the Carolinas. The general use of this formal device is marked throughout the Old South; and it reaches a particularly dramatic statement in the Vieux Carre' of New Orleans in the 1850's. The so-called Monterey type of house in California follows Larkin's initiative. It is a rectangular, verandaed box of adobe with tile roof and glassed windows. (These glassed windows, again, were uncommon in pre-Larkin days.) Larkin's own residence in Monterey had the central hall and staircase plan of the Georgian period - a plan which also persisted into 19th century southern American architecture. The Soberanes adobe, however, has a less formal plan. The principal staircase is at the north of the house and is contained in a narrow hall which gives onto the partially wood framed dining room, kitchen, etc., at the rear (west) of the house, and also has a door into the principal sala, or living room, of the house to the south of this stair hall. Appropriate to the climate of Monterey, the sala opens directly onto the raised step which provides a kind of porch at the front (east) of the building. To the south of the sala is a room corresponding to the hall on the north. Behind this row of stairhall and reception rooms at the front of the house is the row of dining room, kitchen, etc., at the rear. The disposition of second floor spaces follows the same pattern as the front of the first floor. There is no additional space

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at the rear due to the slant of the tile roof, which extends as a shake roof supported by posts over the rear porch at the first floor outside the dining room, kitchen, etc.

The cantilevered wood veranda at the second level of the front has a floor of three very wide and two narrow boards and a simple balustrade of squared posts with thin spindles between. The main roof is cantilevered out over the veranda on rafter extensions without fascia or gutter; the overhang is roofed with shakes. There are wood lintels over the door openings, providing access to the second floor bedrooms from the veranda. Windows in the first floor are double-hung with eight panes in the upper sash and twelve in the lower. The door opening at the northeast has a wood lintel, but windows have plain moldings framing the glassed area. These simple board enframements are also used around the doors and windows at the rear of the first floor. The exterior wall at the rear has been sheathed in horizontal siding. An exterior stairway of wood once led down from the south corner of the second story veranda; this has been removed and replaced with a wooden wall at this end of the veranda.

Although there have been minor modifications of the interior, and major furnishing revisions with each new owner, the Soberanes house still retains its essential pre-American flavor. The thick adobe walls occasion deeply splayed interior openings from room to room, with a two-step change of level from front reception rooms to rear dining room, kitchen, etc. The ceilings are of beams and boards on the first floor; the second floor ceilings are of painted wood boards. The interior walls of the first and second stories have been thinly plastered and painted white; but the irregular adobe underlayer comes through clearly in the uneven wall surfaces. Floors of the front portion of the first floor are tile; those at the higher rear are of wide boards, butted together. The second floor has similar wood floors. In the stairhall at the north with a top window, a fairly high stairway with deep risers and narrow treads has a simple balustrade of squared balusters, roughly carved newel post and plain wood handrail, similar to the ceiling beams. Plain baseboards link the wood framings of door openings in the sala, and rises as the wallstring of the stairs. In the sala, also, there is the suggestion of a dado with a wood molding at the height of chairbacks. (The baseboards, dado and door frames are painted in the sala; the ceiling beams and boards are white. In the stairhall the ceiling beams are left in their natural state, but the boards above are painted white. Baseboards, floors, doors and window trim throughout are painted.) Doors have modest paneled

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surfaces (two squared panels at the top; two rectilinear panels in the center and two higher rectilinear panels at the bottom); hardware is 19th century, if not original. In the sala, or living room, there is a high cast iron mantel framing the fireplace opening of the main house chimney. This mantel has been painted black. The hearth is stone. Windows here have deep splayed reveals and two-paneled shutters (one rectilinear panel above another in each shutter). The reveal below the windows is enclosed providing additional storage in a house notoriously lacking in closets. (Most of the storage is now in large armoires, etc.) Rooms at the rear of the first floor are partially paneled in boards and bats, and have a dado board at the height of the chair backs. Although most of the rear portion had wood floors, the kitchen necessarily has had a more recent linoleum floor, simulating tile.

Prepared by,

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